

STRESS AMONG PROFESSIONALS WITHIN WORK ENVIRONMENT: A REVIEW

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Introduction

In our modern environment today, organization operates dynamically where people are concerned with stress. Work-related stress can affect individuals when they feel an inability to cope or control demands placed on them within their work environment which can eventually contribute to the development of maladaptive behaviours such as drinking and smoking and health conditions such as depression, anxiety, nervousness, fatigue and heart disorder (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EASHW), 2002).

Over the last few years the issues of stress have attained greater prominence. Within a work environment, stress can be a cause as well as an effect of violence. According to Smith *et al*, (1999) who in their research indicated that one third of the working population in developed countries report high to very high levels of stress. Similarly, evidence from newly industrialized countries also showed indicative of the prevalence of stress. Time pressures, excessive demands, role conflicts, ergonomic deficiencies, job security and relationship with customers are particularly common stressors amongst employees in the financial services (Grace & Icompier, 1999). Furthermore, new stressors such as computer breakdowns, computer slowdowns and electronic performance monitoring, have developed as a result of increased human interaction with computers.

Life situations such as a divorce, death, midlife crisis, financial worries, persistent strain of caring for a chronically sick child, nagging health problems or managing a physically or mentally challenged family member, etc as well as business environment are never static but at present an ever dynamic in nature. These ever changing circumstances and conditions brings along with them increased and varying role and behavior expectations including several opportunities and threats. Inherent in these, lays the potential of a state of tensions, fears and anxieties which exert tremendous stress on individuals especially in the work environment, with

an inevitable adverse consequence on productivity. The state of tensions arising from excessive work demands, constraints and opportunities. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1993) is known as stress and can affect workers productivity adversely.

Stress is an undue pressure or demand made on an individual that usually triggers psycho-physiological imbalances, leading to intolerance with subordinates, anger and squabbles between principals and their staff, high blood pressure, insomnia, gastritis etc. Stress is a state of anxiety, conceit heightened emotion and frustration. Lambert (2000) claimed that stress is diagnosed from psychological and physiological symptoms although it varies in psychological definitions. It is seen as a persistent form of heightened emotionality involving such unpleasant emotions as fear, anger or grief. Stress as our reactions to situations that demands constraints or opportunities. Sarason (1992) noted that a person could be stressed by seeing a child fall into rapidly flowing river, by being promoted to a new job which requires much greater responsibilities or being awakened by a fire alarm and then smelling smoke.

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Stress is the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. The emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and physiological reaction to aversive and noxious aspects of work, work environments and work organizations. It is a state characterized by high levels of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping. It is a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning.

Apart from occupational causes of stress, Lambert (2000) in his book "stress factors and organizational growth" stated that when workers are not intrinsically motivated (i.e. career expectations, recognition, etc) could also cause a stress in their work environment which invariably reduces their productivity. The roles of women such as house work; childcare and work environment has increased the level of stress they experience on their jobs. Unlike their male counterparts who only experience stress at their work place, it depicts that jobs allocated to women in their workplace should be consistent to their predicaments. Also the tender nature of women in their reported feelings of fatigue and stress, and tired hands, feet, back and legs more often than men as well a greater insomnia, more aches and pains, digestive problems and headaches indicates that women will experience more stress at work and therefore their jobs will have to reflect these deficiencies.

Types of Stress

In determining, how to cope with your stress symptoms, it is helpful to know what type you're experiencing. The different kinds of stress are; acute and chronic.

Acute stress; - This the most common form of stress that results from demands and pressures of the recent past and anticipated demands and pressures of the near future. Acute stress is the reaction to an immediate threat, commonly known as the fight or flight response. The threat can be any situation that is experienced, even subconsciously or falsely, as a danger. It happens in a short time, during situations where you experience acute stress, you'll likely experience increases in your heart beat and breathing. Your skin might feel cool and clammy and you might notice a change in appetite. In small doses, acute stress may feel exciting, but too much eventually

becomes exhausting and taxing on the body, mind, and spirit. Common acute stressors include: noise, crowding, isolation, hunger, danger, infection, and imagining a threat or remembering a dangerous event. Under most circumstances once the acute threat has passed, the response becomes inactivated and levels of stress hormones return to normal, a condition called the relaxation response.

Most people are able to recognize the symptoms of acute stress. Common symptoms include:

- * Emotional distress (irritability, resentment, anger, anxiety, and depression).
- * Muscular problems (tension, headache, back pain, jaw pain, etc).
- * Problems involving the stomach, gut, and bowels (heart - burn, diarrhea, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome)

Acute stress symptoms often appear when something major happens in your life, like moving, changing jobs, or experiencing a loss of some kind. You might feel stressed when something goes wrong or happens unexpectedly e.g. when you are involved in, a car accident or your child gets hurt at school. Normally, our bodies rest when these types of stressful events cease and our lives get back to normal. The effects are short term and acute stress normally does not have the same effects and extensive damage associated with long term stress. If you experience acute stress frequently, you probably are experiencing episodic stress (Stantified *et al*, 2000).

Episodic stress: Your life might feel disorderly, in perpetual crisis, chaotic, or out of control. You are likely experiencing episodic stress when you:

-feel over-aroused, short-tempered, anxious and or tense most of the time. Describe yourself as having a lot of nervous energy.

- Having “worry wart” tendencies (focus on negative possibilities and anticipate crisis or disaster in most situations).

If you experience episodic acute stress, you are seemingly always facing a new stressful situation.

Chronic stress: It is an unrelenting demands and pressures for seemingly interminable periods of time. Chronic stress is stress that wears you down day after day and year after year and seems endless.

Frequently, however, modern life poses ongoing stressful situations that are not short lived and the urge to act (to fight or to flee) must be suppressed. Stress, then, becomes chronic. Common causes of chronic stress include:-

-poverty, financial worries, dysfunctional families. caring for a chronically —ill family member.

-Feeling trapped in unhealthy relationships or career choices long-term unemployment

-personal belief systems (i.e., believing that the world is a threatening place or you must be perfect at all times) traumatic experiences

-Ongoing highly pressured work.

Chronic stress has been going on for so long, that it is often not recognized by those experiencing it; you may just accept it as part of your personality. Chronic stress may also stem from traumatic experiences that have changed the brain and become internalized, causing recurrent painful and stressful feelings. However, there are also positive and negative stress, which are discussed below:

Positive stress: When it is part of a natural reaction to challenge or danger the body's response is called positive stress. Positive stress can help us evolve as a person by letting go of unwanted thoughts and principle in our life. Very often, at various cross roads of life, stress may remind you of the transitory nature of your experiences, and may prompt you to look for the true happiness of life.

Negative stress: When you feel out of control or under intense pressure, you may experience the physical, emotional, or relational symptoms brought on by negative stress. It is important to give attention to negative stress symptoms and to learn how to identify the situations that evoke them. When these symptoms persist, you are at risk for serious health problems because stress can exhaust your immune system.

Symptoms of Stress

Physical symptoms: It can be caused by other illnesses, so it is important to have a medical doctor treat conditions such as ulcers, compressed disks, or other physical disorders. Remember, however, that the body and mind are not separate entities. The physical problems outlined below may result from or be exacerbated by stress: sleep disturbances, back, shoulder or neck pain, tension or migraine headaches, upset or acid stomach, cramps, heartburn, gas, irritable bowel syndrome, constipation, diarrhea, weight gain or loss, eating disorders, hair loss, muscle tension, fatigue high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, palpitations, asthma or shortness of breath, chest pain, sweaty palms or hands, cold hands or feet, skin problems (hives, eczema, psoriasis, tics, itching), periodontal disease, jaw pain, reproductive problems, immune system suppression: more colds, flu, infections, growth inhibition.

Emotional symptoms: like physical signs, emotional symptoms such as anxiety or depression can mask conditions other than stress. It is important to find out whether they are stress-related or not. In either case the following emotional symptoms are uncomfortable and can affect your performance at work or play, your physical health, or your relationships with others: nervousness, anxiety, depression, moodiness, irritability, frustration, memory problems, lack of concentration, trouble thinking clearly, feeling out of control, substance abuse, phobias, over reaction.

Relational symptoms: The antisocial behaviours displayed in stressful situations can cause the rapid deterioration of relationships with family, friends, co-workers, or even strangers. A person under stress may manifest signs such as increased arguments, isolation from social activities, conflict with co-workers or employers, frequent job changes, road rage, domestic or workplace violence, over reaction.

Causes of Stress

Listing the causes of stress is tricky. There can be innumerable stress factors since different individuals react differently to the same stress conditions. Extreme stress situations for an

Individual may prove to be mild for another, for yet another person the situation might not qualify as stress symptoms at all. Stress is often termed as a twentieth century syndrome, born out of man's race towards modern progress and its ensuing complexities. For that matter, causes such as a simple flight delay to managing a teenage child at home can put you under stress.

*A stress condition can be real or perceived. Yet, our brain reacts the same way to both causes of stress by releasing stress hormones equal to the degree of stress felt. The brain doesn't differentiate between real and imagined stress. It could happen while watching a horror movie or when one is apprehensive of some imminent danger.

*Increasing competition within the sector and consolidation resulting from mergers and acquisitions has led to a reduction of job security, unstable employment and an increase in contingent employment (Schein, 1998).

*Apart from job insecurity and performance pressures, additional factors inherent to work in the financial services sector. Include fear of robbery and development of muscular skeletal problems.

*Literatures abound on what causes stress, which is technically designated as stressors. These stressors put together accounts for the extent of stress a person on experience. These stressors include the following:

Personal Stressors: The moderating effects of personal disposition, such as positive affectivity and negative affectivity, may be important contributing factors to how individuals react to organizational change and adverse events (Shaw *et al*, 2000). Personal characteristics also have a direct effect on work motivation and play a moderating role between work pressures and negative reactions (Houkes *et al*, 2001).

These arise from one's personal life outside of his work place and group membership. Johnson and Gill (2001) established that, disturbances at home can affect one's behaviour, attitude and performance of tasks. Related to these disturbances are sicknesses or death of family members, quarrels at home, divorce related cases etc. when one perceives these threats as important it affects one's well being as well as his or her competence in handling them. Induced stress on personal life events whether major as discussed above or minor such as being harassed by law enforcement agents, problems with electricity power supply etc. This role ambiguity concept is recognized as a potential stressor. In such circumstances, the males and females are able to produce what is expected from them, though the females may become confused than the males in tedious times.

Imbalance in Workload: - Most important changes affecting the banking industry and its workers lives include: fewer staff but increased workloads, higher performance and sales targets, and increased business pressure. Job cutbacks had increased the burden on surviving members of staff, with a substantial number of employees in the finance sector are required to work overtime. Imbalance could also occur when there is work under load, when a worker is not properly utilized; both types are regarded as stressors. For the males, work over load is a usual phenomenon; they cope easily especially when they make up their minds to do so, but the female due to their weak nature, find it difficult to cope with such situations, even when they want to.

Challenging assignments possible targets and tasks: These can also be veritable sources of stress to individuals. Some might perceived it as an opportunity to gain experience while some

might not be able to deal with such situations effectively. Still to some, it is inspirational as it offers them the opportunity to display their talents. For instance, the males who would want to display their talents would be better off in accepting and performing such challenging assignments than the females.

Change and job security: A substantial shift has taken place in the psychological contracts of employs in financial services enterprises, which traditionally ensured individuals of long-term employment security in return for their hard work and loyalty (Giga, 2001). Organizations that have previously viewed employees as long-term assets to be developed are now beginning to. They think of them simply in terms of cost that need to be cut back (Gladstone and Reynolds, 1997). Inevitably, this has left post- restructuring workforces facing greater uncertainty and increasing up with new ways of work organization can be very daunting for employees especially older workers who can find these pressures particularly challenging and not motivating due to the obsolescence of skills learnt over a long working life (Huuhtanen, 1988; Giga, 2001). These pose as powerful stressors in Individuals in the work place, especially to workers that are skillful. Male tend to be more skillful than the females and this would seldom affect their material well-being or job security than the female.

Poor workplace job design; along with a demanding workload can be a contributing factor to workers suffering from visual, shoulder, neck, back, wrist and hand problems. This can be a major cause of psychological distress for workers (Smith *et al*, 1999).

Fear of Violence: Bank robberies have the potential to be particularly traumatic, with some victims suffering from psychological distress six months after the incident occurred and others reporting symptoms associated with post traumatic stress disorder (Kamphuis and Emmelkamp, 1998). Furthermore, fear of the violent incident recurring again may make individuals particularly distressed. This fear is also on workers who have not actually witnessed any violence but perceive themselves as likely future targets.

High demand/low control

Within the financial services sector, there is evidence to support model associating work Koutsoyanrii (1985) related stress with jobs are highly demanding while simultaneously allowing little control. Many areas of work correspond to this model, whereby individuals have workloads but relatively little autonomy in completing their assigned tasks

CONCLUSION

The complexity of modern organizations has increased both in the activities at modern workplace. This has had significant impact on the individuals and groups who work in these organizations. The nature and character of the mode of work organization in modern workplaces has assumed a more rapid pace, and employees have to work under conditions of uncertainty and pressures. Pressures at work have virtually eliminated leisure in the lives of employees and have created the problem of stress at work. However, some of the stresses experienced by employees at work are not always instigated by the organizations where these workers work. Sometimes, some of the stresses experienced by employees are self-induced.

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